

GOVERNOR RICHARDSON'S BLUE RIBBON WATER TASK FORCE

First Quarter Report

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TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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Introduction

Governor Richardson's Blue Ribbon Water Task Force is a citizen advisory group appointed by the Governor for the purpose of advising the Governor and water-related state agencies on water issues in New Mexico.

Task Force members represent a diversity of viewpoints on water from around the state. The Task Force meets monthly to receive briefings on critical water concerns, visit specific locations to more fully understand complex water issues, participate in dialogue with key state agency leaders and decision-makers, and consider and make recommendations on water. Full minutes of the Task Force meetings are included on its web site, <http://eweb.lanl.gov/blueribbon.htm>.

Governor's Blue Ribbon Water Task Force (GBRWTF) Makes Recommendations to Governor for Signing and Vetoing Major Water Bills from the 2005 Legislative Session

At its February and March meetings, the GBRWTF spent time examining water-related legislation that was generated in the State of New Mexico 2005 47th Legislature. Many of the bills dealt with funding of water projects; however, some dealt with administrative and policy aspects of managing New Mexico's water resources. The GBRWTF recommended the following actions on major water legislation passed during the Session. The GBRWTF believes that these actions continue New Mexico's commitment to making investments necessary for the general welfare of its citizens and in order to assure a stable economic environment for future generations.

Major Bill Recommendation Summary

Bill No.	Short Title	Action
HB 195	Create Strategic Water Reserve	Sign
HB 885	Severance Tax bond Projects (\$12M for the Pecos Settlement)	Sign
HB 917	Prosecution for Various Misuses of Water	Sign
HB 1110	Public Peace, Health, Safety & Welfare (Funding for Adjudication)	Sign
SB 172	Create Indian Water Rights Settlement Fund	Sign
SB 706	Tax Credit Definition of Produced Water	Veto

Task Force Encouraged by Temporary to Permanent Position Conversion of OSE/ISC Staff Positions

Converting positions in the OSE and ISC offices from temporary to permanent status has been a priority position of the GBRWTF. Late in 2004, members met with the Governor and expressed that it was extremely important for the temporary positions - which before the Session constituted one-third of total staff - be converted to permanent staff to insure long-term stability and productivity on critical water initiatives. The GBRWTF was very encouraged that the Governor and the Legislature approved a plan to convert almost two-thirds of the positions from temporary to permanent status. **The task force strongly encourages the Governor and the Legislature to complete this process in the 2006 Session.**

Progress Made on Funding for Pecos Basin

Another key part of the major water initiatives supported by the GBRWTF is funding to complete the Pecos Basin Settlement. The GBRWTF appreciates the Governor's leadership role on this issue and the securing of \$12M for the settlement. Approximately \$18M will be required to complete the settlement process. Failure to complete the funding next year will jeopardize the status of the agreements currently in place. **The GBRWTF strongly encourages the Governor and Legislature to fund the entire required amount in the 2006 Session.**

Active Water Resources Management Provides Viable Plan for Managing New Mexico Water Resources

A cornerstone of the State Water Plan is the deployment of the Active Water Resources Management (AWRM) Initiative. AWRM sets in place a comprehensive set of strategies to manage New Mexico water resources in times of drought and shortage. AWRM will fundamentally alter how shortages are managed to facilitate protection of senior water rights holders. Another key feature of AWRM is that they will allow for water to be temporarily moved in an expedited fashion from senior to junior users during periods of drought which will help mitigate economic impacts during these times.

The GBRWTF appreciates the Governor's very public support of this strategy and encourages the Legislature to continue endorsing the necessary policies, laws, and funding to fully implement the required activities.

GBRWTF Encourages Aggressive Plans to Complete Indian Water Rights Settlement

New Mexico stands poised to complete a number of major Indian Water Rights Settlements: Navajo, Aamodt, and the Taos Pueblo. Senate Bill 172 (Create Indian Water Rights Settlement Fund) establishes a framework for funding these settlements in the future. Accomplishing this in the next 3 to 5 years would help create certainty in how New Mexico's waters are used for generations to come and provide a sound economic future with increased clarity of water ownership and evidence of political willingness to invest in the state. **The GBRWTF encourages that all levels of New Mexico government and the Legislature establish aggressive long-term plans to secure the necessary funding to bring closure to these important settlements.**

W.A.T.E.R.S. AND W.R.A.T.S. Programs Critical to Success of Statewide Adjudication

The OSE and ISC have made significant progress in modernizing the records and data collection required to effectively manage the state's water resources. The W.A.T.E.R.S. and W.R.A.T.S. programs are the foundation for a comprehensive GIS and informational system framework. These efforts are critical to accelerating and completing adjudications around New Mexico. Investments in the necessary data and technology tools will save millions of dollars that have previously been spent in cumbersome adjudication processes. **The GBRWTF strongly encourages the Governor and Legislature to continue funding these efforts at a high level.**